

# DESCRIPTION OF AN IMMATURE MALE KERGUELEN PINTAIL *ANAS EATONI* COLLECTED AT MAWSON STATION, EASTERN ANTARCTICA

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## INTRODUCTION

On 6 December 2001, an unidentified duck (*Anatidae*) was sighted at Mawson Station (67°35'S, 62°52'E) in Eastern Antarctica. It was seen flying and walking around the Station between 6 and 11 December, often feeding in puddles at the sea shore (Figure 1). The duck was not seen after 11 December 2001 and was found dead on 29 December 2001. It is thought to have died during a blizzard on 13 December.

The duck was collected and returned to Australia for positive identification. The specimen was sent to the Western Australian Museum where it was prepared into a study skin (registered number A34698) and identified as an immature male Kerguelen Pintail *Anas eatoni*.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SPECIMEN

The bird appears to be an

immature in post juvenile moult, a plumage stage apparently so far undescribed. Accordingly, a full description of the specimen is detailed below:

Total length 443 mm; weight 340 g; entire culmen 45.0 mm; exposed culmen 35.0 mm; bill width 12.6 mm; bill depth (from rear of nostrils) 15.2 mm; wing 219 mm; tail 93 mm; tarsus 33 mm; middle toe and claw 48 mm. Skull fully ossified and testes 11.8 x 4.1 and 11.3 x 4.6 mm.

Forehead, crown and nape blackish-brown (the feathers edged with dull cinnamon brown). Lores, ear coverts, cheeks, sides of face and neck paler, the feathers variably edged dull buff (there is a richer tone on chin and cheeks and greyer on foreneck), the feather centres (sometimes reduced to mere spots) dull brownish-grey, producing a freckled effect, heaviest and darkest on the ear coverts, but barely visible on chin and throat.

Hind neck blackish-brown, the



Figure 1. The Kerguelen Pintail feeding in snow-melt at Mawson Station, 9 December, 2001. Photographed by L. Irvine.

feathers with obscure warm brown edging (the zone contrasting rather sharply with sides of neck). Upper mantle mostly dark greyish or blackish-brown mottled with dull white, the feathers with pale greyish-brown or whitish concealed bases, grading darker brown distally and with greyish-white tips; some feathers on the sides of lower mantle vermiculated with dull white or buffy white or with fine wavy whitish lines; also the pale fringes generally becoming broader on the lower mantle giving an overall mottled appearance.

Back mostly dark brown to blackish-brown, the feathers with concealed pale greyish-brown bases, darker distally and with two narrow irregular white or greyish-white bars and greyish tips. Rump feathers mostly brown with whitish margins. Short scapulars mostly greyish-brown basally and with blackish, dull white and buffy white bars and vermiculations, the longer pointed feathers with broad blackish central streak grading to brown (sometimes mottled darker) and edged with dull white.

Lesser upperwing coverts mostly brown, edged with brownish-white or greyish-white; greater coverts mostly greyish-brown with dull greyish-white tips that form a border to speculum. Primaries and primary coverts mostly dark brown on outer webs and tips grading paler greyish-brown on inner webs and narrowly edged with greyish-white, shafts pale brown (darker

towards tip); secondaries blackish-brown to blackish on the outer web, slightly glossed with dark olive green (forming a dull speculum) and fairly broadly tipped cinnamon buff shading to white terminally, and greyish-brown on inner web (the outer feathers with a whitish subterminal bar or mark, and white tips); tertials long and pointed, black broadly edged with brown or brownish-grey and narrowly margined with greyish-white. Tail (wedge shaped, the feathers somewhat acutely pointed) mostly greyish-brown to dark brown the feathers with narrow dull white outer edges.

Lower neck and upper breast mostly dull buffy brown coarsely mottled with dark brown bars and buffy white. Lower breast and belly dull buffy brown, the feathers with whitish concealed bases, narrow brownish shaft streak and some feathers with a greyish subterminal blotch (giving a fairly mottled/spotted appearance). Sides of breast and flanks mostly dark brown with coarse wavy whitish or buffy brown bars, occasional feathers have the brown areas peppered/vermiculated with white and greyish white (giving a mottled appearance).

Thighs barred with dull brown and brownish-white. Undertail coverts mostly irregularly barred or marked with brown and dull cinnamon buff and edged white. Axillaries barred with dark brown and white. Lesser underwing coverts mostly dark greyish-brown with whitish tips; median coverts similar but with a whitish

subterminal bar and tip and greater coverts grey with a faint whitish subterminal bar and tip; undersurface of remiges brownish grey (paler overall tone than coverts), the secondaries tipped white. Undertail similar to primaries.

Bare parts (from photographs of live bird): iris dark brown; bill strongly patterned, upper mandible sides bright blue or bright bluish-grey with top of culmen from forehead to tip (including nostrils) greyish-black forming a dark central zone, lower mandible brownish grey with what appears to be blackish tomia (cutting edges); legs and feet olive brown, webs dark grey.

#### DISCUSSION

Judging from plumage (especially the relatively small and dull wing speculum and traces of breeding plumage on upperparts), size of testes and date of collection (December), we believe this bird to be an immature. The acquisition of breeding plumage in adults occurs from April to July and is complete by September. Also judging from the plumage (limited extent or traces of vermiculated feathering

only really visible on the 'shoulders') and the short tarsus we consider the bird to belong to the nominate subspecies *A. eatoni eatoni* from Iles Kerguelen.

The Kerguelen Pintail is endemic to the Kerguelen and Crozet Islands of the Indian Ocean, where it is essentially sedentary (Marchant and Higgins, 1990). The bird collected at Mawson Station is thought to have been caught in an intense weather system and transported 2000 km SSW, from the Kerguelen Islands to the Antarctic coast (Irvine *et. al.* in prep).

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#### REFERENCE

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